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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 001363

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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN MFA ON OSCE IN GEORGIA AND GENEVA TALKS

REF: MOSCOW 1355

Classified By: Pol M/C Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. MFA IVth CIS Ambassador-at-large Dmitriy Tarabrin and Deputy Alexey Dvinyanin in a May 26 meeting reiterated that a continued OSCE presence in Georgia was contingent on approval of Russia's OSCE proposal for separate monitoring missions in South Ossetia and Georgia proper. Dvinyanin defended Russia's walkout on the first day of the May 18-19 Geneva Talks, and judged the final result a success, with security and the Joint Incident Prevention Mechanism discussed, and agreement reached on the next meeting date. Tarabrin outlined Moscow's financial, administrative, and election assistance to South Ossetia, while acknowledging South Ossetian "President" Kokoity's shortcomings. While pushing for the reopening of the Zemo-Larsi checkpoint, the MFA is not contemplating political initiatives with the Saakashvili government, and Tarabrin denied any direct contact with the Georgian opposition. Analysts did not see a "grand plan" behind Russia's obstinacy in Vienna and Geneva, but agreed Russia had little to lose by taking an uncompromising position in negotiations. End Summary

OSCE mandate

12. (C) Further to reftel report on Georgia, MFA IVth CIS Ambassador-at-large Dmitriy Tarabrin and Deputy Alexey Dvinyanin in a May 26 meeting disagreed that Russia stood alone in rejecting the Greek compromise OSCE mandate proposal, claiming that a total of "three to four" delegations had objected to the OSCE chair's language. Dvinyanin said the West would have to accept Russia's draft if it wanted to preserve the OSCE's presence in South Ossetia. He promised that a high-ranking Russian official would soon travel to Vienna to restate Russia's position, which included a mission to Georgia with an office in Tbilisi, with two separate monitoring missions in South Ossetia and Georgia proper. Dvinyanin said Russia rejected allowing the monitors from either mission to cross the administrative boundary line for "technical reasons" only, but not because of political concerns. Tarabrin said that a solution to the OSCE mandate question could be found, but underscored that Russia's redline remained the establishment of independent monitoring missions.

13. (C) Dvinyanin called upon the participants of the Geneva talks to maintain the "ethic of diplomacy," deploring one delegation member's description of Russia as the "occupying force," while another described the Abkhaz and South Ossetian

authorities as "proxy governments." Russia and the U.S. needed to cooperate in reaching the joint goal of reestablishing trust between the parties, including between Russia and Georgia, he said.

Geneva Talks

¶4. (C) Dvinyanin defended Russia's walkout on the first day of the May 18-19 Geneva Talks. Claiming that Russia had prevailed upon the Abkhaz and South Ossetians to participate, he charged that the West had not done anything to ensure Abkhazia's participation when it became clear its condition for participation would not be met: the publication of the UNOMIG report by May 15 per UNSCR 1866. Dvinyanin specified that Russia had not "walked out" of the talks, but like South Ossetia had demanded that the talks be postponed, as it made no sense to discuss security issues in Abkhazia without Abkhaz participation. Dvinyanin said Russia and the South Ossetians had only left after the co-chairs had not obliged with DFM Karasin's request, and insisted Russia would have done the same if, for example, the Georgian delegation had not participated.

¶5. (C) Dvinyanin judged the Geneva talks to be a success, citing "substantive security talks" and the agreement on the next meeting date, which had not been possible during the fourth round of talks. He maintained that all sides had expressed satisfaction with the Joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (JIPRM) in South Ossetia and requested

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U.S. support in creating a UN resolution acceptable to Abkhazia, as Abkhaz authorities made the implementation of a JIPRM in Abkhazia contingent on the UNSCR.

Russian assistance to South Ossetia

¶6. (C) Tarabrin said that Russia's Ministry of Regions continued disbursing the remaining 8.5 billion rubles out of the total of 10 million rubles promised in assistance, with the goal of building 1000 houses and rebuilding a further 400 before winter. In addition, Russia was sending more personnel from its own institutions, including staff from North Ossetia to serve as counselors for South Ossetian ministers. Russia was also assisting South Ossetia in making the May 31 legislative elections as transparent as possible. After the elections, Tarabrin said South Ossetia had to break up its clannish structure and instead consolidate around one central power. Tarabrin and Dvinyanin conceded the "complicated" working environment in South Ossetia, with the slow disbursement of Russian aid the result of well-founded concerns that it would simply "disappear." Acknowledging South Ossetian "President" Kokoity's political shortcomings, neither saw any viable alternative to him at this stage.

Relations to Georgia

¶7. (C) Tarabrin described Russian efforts to improve relations with Georgia as "technical, with a political aspect." He noted that Russia had completed repairs on the Zemo-Larsi checkpoint between Russia and Georgia proper, which, once reopened, promised to improve Russia-Georgia as well as Russia-Armenia transit. Tarabrin said Russia wanted to reopen the checkpoint to trade, but Georgia's position was unknown. He did not indicate any movement on restoring direct flights between Russia and Georgia. Reiterating that Saakashvili remained a "war criminal" in GOR eyes, Tarabrin said Russia maintained ties with NGOs in Georgia, and had contact with some Georgian officials at international seminars. However, Tarabrin insisted there was no direct

contact with opposition forces. He termed the links between the Russian and Georgian orthodox churches "not crucial."

Analysts

¶18. (C) Analysts we talked to did not see a "grand plan" behind Russia's behavior, but thought Moscow had little to lose by driving a hard line. Nikolai Silayev from the MGIMO South Caucasus Center said Russia's demand for independent OSCE monitoring missions was essentially unchanged since August 2008 as a "symbolically important" result of the war. Russia saw no need to compromise, just as the West was unwilling to compromise on fulfilling Georgia's NATO aspirations. The promise of heightened transparency through the presence of international observers was not a goal in itself, but simply one instrument to increase security. However, other instruments were already doing the job, such as the Russian troop presence, staffing assistance to the South Ossetian government, and the JIPRM. Sergei Markedonov from the Institute for Political and Military Analysis agreed with Silayev that Russia's walkout from the Geneva talks was a natural consequence of the UN SYG's failure to publish the UNOMIG report on time, given that Russia's ability to lead the breakaway regions to the negotiating table was limited. Russia had "little to lose" by insisting on its redlines.

¶19. (C) Alexander Konovalov from the Institute for Strategic Assessments thought Moscow did not care about keeping OSCE monitors within South Ossetia, as long as they remained in Georgia proper. While it was conceivable that the UN could take over in South Ossetia if the OSCE mandate renewal failed, the perspective for an international presence in South Ossetia remained "foggy." Russia had no grand plan for the regions except for maintaining recognition of their independence, according to Konovalov.

Comment

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¶10. (C) Russia does not perceive a cost in taking uncompromising positions in Geneva and Vienna, as it increases its military, financial, and other assistance to the breakaway regions. Although our positions are closer on UNOMIG, Russia's readiness to walk away from international monitors will make it difficult to secure Georgian requirements for a status-neutral mandate, in which Russia is characterized as a party to the conflict.
BEYRLE